

A New Thoughtfulness in Contemporary China

Critical Voices in Art and Aesthetics

Edited by Jörg Huber and Zhao Chuan



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Preface

“In recent years the cultural tide has gradually been changing. Increasingly, non-Western new wave artists have tended to return to indigenous experience and local history for inspiration.” Chang Tsong-zung’s observations accurately explain the motives behind this collection of essays. Ever since the 1990s, large areas of China’s culture—and the visual arts in particular—have generally evolved with an eye on the West and on the international art market, and thus correspond to projections of ‘Chinese art’ coming from outside China. This context of ‘opening up’, of cultural colonialist constructs and ideological reflexes, together with the production and dissemination of the corresponding clichés, has also influenced art journalism and theory construction. The choice of themes, the style of criticism and the orientation of fields of discourse clearly conform to international guidelines.

At the same time, however, on the fringes and in fragments, there have been trends which have resisted or explicitly opposed this euphorization—or estrangement from reality—and in which artists, although inspired by the ‘opening up’, have concentrated on their own everyday lives, on the critical survey of their own traditions, and on individual sensibilities. These self-referential insights are not the expression of a reactionary, ‘protectionist’, nationalist mindset; rather, they bear witness to a heightened awareness of the complex changes taking place in the economy and in society, in everyday culture and in urban life. They are the expressions of personal experience and empirical knowledge and are not ideologically formatted projections of a collective imaginary.

It is clear that these trends are presently gaining in importance. While the international art market has proved to be crisis-prone and subject to fashions and trends (‘Indian art’ is in vogue at the moment), the celebration of the West is in decline in China; the topics that are now coming more and more to the fore concern self-positioning, the critical borrowing from tradition and, as a consequence, new structural analyses of present-day positions. This involves questioning our own time, asking how individuality and community can be conceptualized and practised within the global context of neoliberalism and the consumer society; it also involves

the critical working out of definitions and the question of who may and can speak out and manifest themselves and where this can be done.

The contributors are Chinese colleagues who experience and reflect these changes in practice and in theory. The main emphasis is on examples of artistic work in the field of visual culture, and on reflections concerning aesthetic theory. Both mark out an open terrain of interchange between artistic practice, cultural positionings, political intervention and social subjectivations. The choice of authors, the examples and the questions reflect positions and insights that are individual yet can at the same time be considered exemplary. This publication runs the risks of all translations/transmissions. Obviously, misunderstandings have occurred: during discussions with colleagues, in the compilation of the texts, and in our attempts to understand what was being presented. It is to be hoped that the gaps in our understanding will have not only counterproductive effects, i.e. that the experiences of our Chinese friends might act as a productive irritant when we endeavour to think in similar ways or undertake similar things. This kind of transculturality of experiences and discourses can only succeed in a spirit of mutual cooperation: my very special thanks go to all the authors, to my friend and co-editor Zhao Chuan, as well as to Helen Wallimann, Ouyang Yu, Sujing Xu, Hsin-Mei Chuang, Eva Lüdi Kong, Lis Jung Lu and Benjamin Marius Schmidt.

Traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy—which were, or still are, highly significant for Chinese culture and society—supply a central field and subject of this new reflection. The question is raised of their potential significance in our day, the question also of the possibility and the need to borrow from tradition, to create tradition. *Chang Tson-zung* directs our attention to the so-called literati¹ culture and puts forward the thesis that a new positioning of painting/calligraphy should follow the ‘spirit’ of this culture although—or perhaps precisely because—the conditions of life have radically changed in the course of the intervening centuries. In his contribution, he sketches the main characteristics of this ‘spirit’ and at the same time stresses an interesting difference: whereas intellectuals or artists of today often develop their critical attitudes through confrontation, dissidence, opposition and subversion, literati put into practice a critical culture based on the paradoxical combination of participation and non-involvement in which critical participation was not conceived as interventionist action. This attitude, which forms the basis of an actual culture theory of *shu-hua* (calligraphy-painting), could be seminal for the

1 | According to the principle of literati art (*wenrenhua*), which originated during the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), the completely literate, cultured artist who revealed the privacy of his vision in his art was preferred over the ‘professional’, whose art was more immediately attractive.

potential present-day relevance of painting/calligraphy. It also raises the question of the artist's self-conception, of the relationship between intellectuals and artists and, in general, between art and politics. As against the self-conception of the artistic avant-garde and their oppositional gestures, the author draws up an artistic strategy which consists of combining engagement with the present on the one hand with the productive power of desistance, of absence, on the other hand, in the shape of 'conservatism', i.e. explicitly as a continuation of (literati) tradition. This paradoxical conception of contemporaneity could mean that a calligrapher, while using new computer technology and exposing himself in the new media, could at the same time adhere closely to the tradition of the literati and try to carry on their 'spirit'.

What many conservative traditionalists regard as a betrayal is also interpreted by the artist *Lu Dadong* as a possibility for renewal and innovative recontextualization. However, unlike *Chang Tsong-zung*, *Lu Dadong* does not go back to the literati but to Zen Buddhism. As a calligraphic artist, he stresses the importance of writing with its complex traditions concerning, for example, techniques, instruments and materials. At the same time, he stresses that writing as an event, that the artistic act as a happening, that spontaneity and intuition are just as important as acquired skills and know-how with regard to craft traditions. The calligraphic act as an artistic action is never determined purely by intent, it can never be fully understood. *Lu Dadong* refers to various cultural contexts, to Shamanism, Taoism etc. Calligraphy is performance. In his actions he continually redefines the limits and transition points within the aesthetic happening and with regard to the public; at the same time there are no limits as to the means, media etc. employed. He aims at a spiritual encounter with the people who are present, in the belief that the interaction between tradition and the present will take place within the hearts and minds of the participants. Tradition does not have to be 'restored', its presence manifests itself in the artistic (inter)action.

Kong Guoqiao follows a similar path by underlining the connection between calligraphy and *dao* (also known as *tao*). *Dao*, the path, is a broad concept and more complex than, for example, the Western concept of idea or knowledge. Calligraphy, as the principal art form in Chinese cultural history, is at the same time a form of personal development, a philosophy and a way of life. It is, according to *Kong Guoqiao*, world-opening in the Heideggerian sense—but what happens when the world is not the same any more, when everyday worlds in which traditions emerge and take effect and which are also *dao*, the path, undergo radical change? In such a case—and this is *Kong's* pessimistic answer—one should ask oneself whether calligraphy today is perhaps nothing more than abstract common sense, no longer a cultural element in our *Lebenswelt*: part of our 'inheritance', not art.

Chen Anying treats this question more optimistically, although within a wider perspective. Whereas for thousands of years the development of

Chinese society and civilization was characterized by continuity, the past hundred years are marked by breaks, discontinuity and revolution. The result is a fragmented society that can no longer find itself and thus struggles to find its own identity. This fragmentation is the cause for radical change, dissidence, pressure to innovate, and the 'progressive' rejection of all tradition. Against this background, Chen Anying suggests that one should not simply cancel out the tradition of literati painting, which is so central to Chinese culture—an art history which, as he stresses, differs radically from that of the West and stands out as something culturally specific and unique. However, the vistas he opens up remain very general: according to him, the cultivation of this tradition must not be seen too narrowly; it could take place in the new, open contexts and thus counterbalance the modernization euphoria, which is no more than an attempt to cover up the damage caused by the galloping changes of the last hundred years.

A critical appraisal of tradition demands a critical working out of definitions, as *Wang Chunchen* demonstrates, using the term realism as an example. It is important that the term and the practice which he describes are analyzed in their historical context: in relation to their functional attributions in official cultural politics ('social realism'), as an instrument of normative party politics (Cultural Revolution), as an aesthetics of opposition (in the battle against Japan, Korea, imperialism), as a trendy branding (politpop) or as a medium for the subtle observation and reproduction of everyday experiences (grassroots tendencies). In order to talk about and evaluate the possible meanings of 'realistic' art, precise knowledge is required: an understanding of the 'internal' coherence of Chinese history. To this end, additional efforts are also required within China (cf. Wang Nanming's article). The lack of such knowledge can be seen, for example, in the superficial labellings in the international discourse on Chinese art (Chinese art is realistic, political, etc.)

The question if and how traditions are effective and can be discovered and 'updated', is raised in an inspiring way by the artist *Qiu Zhijie*. Following the example of archaeological artefacts, he has created eight pillars made up of cement cylinders. There are texts engraved in the cut surfaces (i.e. the texts are not visible), each pillar containing texts on one particular theme: revolutionary slogans from Chinese history; statements concerning perceptions of foreignness in China; texts from the history of calligraphy; a list of songs from a karaoke bar; e-mails written or received by the artist, etc. This aesthetic concept addresses and exposes the complexity of the question of remembrance and memory. The focus is on aspects of the reciprocity of presence and absence, on the tension between individual and collective memory, the mediality of remembrance and memory, and, crucially, the importance of writing, including handwriting, or rather the calligraphic composition of the ideogram, not least for the ideological formatting of a society. Remembrance/memory always takes place in the imagination and is never physical. Qiu Zhijie composes an impressive picture of this dilemma in his eighth pillar, *luanma* (mess): the column

contains a jumble of random characters which a virus produced in the artist's computer. The unreadable texts that result represent the black hole of not-knowing, which, in remembrance and the construction of tradition, always foils the desire for knowledge. "They [the ideograms] have not lost their meaning: they only deviate from the rules governing our reading. However, we are powerless in dealing with such deviations."

These are the deviations that occur in everyday life and that cannot be grasped through grand narrative formatings or the polarizing of world-cultures. So we have to shake off rigid worldviews, and thus empire ideologies, says *Chen Chieh-jen* in his discussion with *Zhao Chuan*. The two theatre makers deconstruct these worldviews and geopolitical block ideologies by building on people's everyday experiences: *Grass Stage*. Writing is action, intervention, bottom-up; it is not a question of creating politics through theatre—on the contrary, as a joint performance of individual actions, theatre is politics: theatre seen as the voice of those who are normally silent, uninvolved and marginalized. The communion of the many as a 'sharing', on the internet for example, gives rise to an—always provisional—sense of 'people', of belonging to and forming a collective, a community. Aesthetics as the construction of visibility, as a strategy for 'de-empiring'.

Chen Chieh-jen bases his ideas on what he sees in his home country, Taiwan: Americanization and the dominance of international capital, the failure of the politics of reform. It is not the difference between East and West that is decisive, says the author, but the worldwide dominance of neoliberalism. *Gao Shiming* develops this idea further with his observation that the post-colonial debate has lost its bite. 'Localization', 'heterogeneity', 'difference' etc. are concepts which, according to him, have degenerated into slogans of international capitalism. Against this horizon, how can a critical culture and politics that seek to build on tradition without at the same time losing sight of the global context find their bearings? *Bentu* (homeland, literally: soil of one's origins, native soil) is the key word in Gao Shiming's subtly argued attempt to define the dialectics of re-signification in the global *bentu* (global 'home') conflict: return as re-discovery, as a process of dissolution and reconstruction, contemporaneity through remembrance that does not seek identity in the fundamentalist sense of going back to national roots. *Bentu*, then, as the historical site of cultural and artistic production, not of Chinese contemporary art but of contemporary Chinese art, a notion that, rather than fixating, opens up. Gao Shiming reveals a new range of possibilities with this shift in terminology: "Today we are no longer satisfied with [...] struggling for space and a position in the globalized edifice: we want to create a new homeland, a historical site of cultural creation and renewed subjects. This is the site of 'contemporary Chinese art'—although we lack a profound understanding of 'contemporary Chinese art'; we even lack the basic discourse and a cognitive framework. [...] 'Contemporary Chinese art' is an unfinished plan, a possible world. It is precisely because it is a 'possible world' that

‘contemporary Chinese art’ has nothing to do with any form of nationalism or fundamentalism.”

With regard to the problem of self-positioning and the search for new meaning within our rapidly changing daily lives, art—more precisely, the artistic process and the associated aesthetics of curating, the creation of a public sphere—plays an important role. *David Chen* discusses this aspect by taking as examples two exhibitions which he organized with the artist Gu Dexin at the celebrated gallery *Three on the Bund* in Shanghai. Gu’s installations thematize the exhibition area and the urban context and thus the conditions and economics of the art system. Chen points out possible references to Robert Smithson’s ‘non-site’ and Rem Koolhaas’ ‘generic city’ concepts and procedures. Gu stresses the self-referential dimension of his interventions: by directing attention to the production and performance of art, he allows the viewer to observe his own reception of the art works and to position himself accordingly. This aesthetics, with its intermingling of art and exhibition, creates a variety of small, locally specific narratives which escape the domination of the abstract grand narratives of politics, the art market, institutions, or social formatting.

For *Wang Nanming* and *Zhu Qi*, too, the grand narratives which the West uses to create a picture of China and the Chinese are the principal problem to be dealt with by art and aesthetic theory. Whereas *Zhu Qi* describes in detail the production and functioning of clichés and, with his demand for a distinct Chinese aesthetics founded on tradition, draws attention to the significance of transcendence and abstraction in the history of Chinese art, *Wang Nanming* calls for more exhibitions arising out of a criticism of the projections of the foreign eye and explicitly directed at a domestic public. Whereas the big international events celebrating ‘Chinese art’ use superficial clichés, the exhibitions which reflect individual, specific contexts show that, in order to understand the exhibits and to formulate criticism, a full understanding of all the relevant conditions and circumstances is essential. Without this understanding there is nothing to be done. Using two memorable and impressive examples of art by *Jin Feng* and *He Chengyao*, *Wang Nanming* proves that, and shows how, highly differentiated contextualization is the *sine qua non* of the aesthetic and political power of independent art production and art reception.

For *Jiang Wei*, too, exhibitions are important showcases for the interplay of art practice, aesthetic strategies, the creation of a public sphere, culture-management, and politics. Two important photo-festivals with very different concepts provide examples. One of them concentrates on international prestige and ‘big names’, the other on meeting intellectual demands, on the analysis of visual culture and the discussion of high-brow topics. This difference shows that in China, as elsewhere, there is an expanding field of art festivals, biennials and other big events which are often sponsored by local party bureaucrats and the tourism authorities. The feverish activity of the art market and the art industry produces ever more events which are praised in the loftiest of terms although they

are weak in content and conception and serve primarily as a vehicle for the global circulation of ‘art people’, works of art, notions and attitudes, and as prestige enhancement for the venues. Against the background of these observations the author considers the development and trends of contemporary photography in China: the purpose and practice of the photographic image, in relation to the record of co-option by Western art or political propaganda on the one hand, and in relation to the present in which photography increasingly engages with the everyday lives of ordinary people on the other hand. (There are connections here to Wang Chunchen’s discussion of realism.) The attempt to describe a specific aesthetics of photography—also in the context of an aesthetics of visual culture—is intimately related to the attempt to think the present and to ask what ‘contemporaneity’ might mean: “Since the 1990s, the Western ideological discourse has been intervening in China at all levels, exerting a comprehensive influence on social and cultural life. Because of our anxious and continuous desire to join the ‘contemporary’ countries, we regarded ‘contemporary’ as a once-and-for-all solution. However, for lack of systematic research into Western histories and cultures, we ignored the inherent defects and self-contradictions of this contemporaneity. The picture of contemporary Chinese art was established on this superficial and surface understanding, paying no attention to Chinese matters, the reality of a weak cultural foundation and the lack of contemporary ‘software’.”

Dao Zi regards concept photography (whose beginnings he connects with the political events of 4 June 1989²) as an exemplary and innovative aesthetics of committed, self-reflexive, photographic art. In this context, by the way, we can also find explicitly feminist works—still an exception in contemporary China. (See also the work of He Chengyao in the article by Wang Nanming.) As a continuation of concept photography *Dao Zi* names postmodern post-photography, which uses the staging of pictures, the play of construction and deconstruction, the re-editing of historical material, the combination of text and picture, and also experiments with the aesthetic dimensions of documentary pictorial work. This enlargement of the spectrum of artistic photographic practice and aesthetic strategies corresponds with the contingency and fragmentation of present-day concepts of individuality and identity—a correspondence which should be understood as a critique of traditional ideologies and world views and also of the aesthetics that serve them.

As Jiang Wei and other authors stress, artistic practice and aesthetic reflection must be pursued in the context of a new consumer and communications culture. In spite of restrictions through controls and censorship, the internet is omnipresent, and this, according to the artist *Jin Feng*,

2 | The Tiananmen Square massacre: On 3 and 4 June 1989 the Chinese military put a violent end to the occupation of Tiananmen Square (‘Square of Heavenly Peace’) and thus to the public uprising catalyzed by a democratic student movement. Many artists and cultural creatives went into exile or inner emigration.

opens up new productive possibilities, for art is, above all, social exchange. (See his work which is mentioned in the article by Wang Nanming.) This aspiration is, however, continually being thwarted in the established art world by the self-referentiality of ivory tower art as well as by the galleries and exhibitions that cater to the needs of the upper classes. Art is exclusive, communication formalizes. But in the open, flowing world of the internet, different forms of publicness, of direct communication as well as grassroots awareness can be developed, while at the same time, however, the negative side of this 'freedom'—the power and violence of structures and systems—is equally evident. The internet presents the artist with the challenge of exposing himself through his actions and positioning himself self-critically with regards to his approach to the public. Questions of participation and self-management are central aspects of any internet practice which sees itself as an element of the art system while at the same time subverting it from the inside.

There is another venue which could fulfil a similar intermediary role. The theatre is on the one hand the stage and locus of official tradition-building, of traditional pictures, of propaganda. On the other hand it is increasingly the experimental scene of critical artistic practice and aesthetic discourse. Citing various dramas as examples, *Tao Qingmei* shows how directors and groups deal with individual and collective problems in contemporary China. Whereas in the official theatre the collective continues to be celebrated in the emotive terminology of 'community of the people', alternative and contemporary projects experiment with social realities and the experience of the vulnerable, alienated, helpless, vexed, fragmented individual torn between post-1989 depression and the consumer culture. The challenge is how, based on that situation of the individual, one can arrive at a new conception of the collective without falling into the trap of creating just another variant of the official theatre which celebrates the 'new collective' of 'liberated subjects' in the style of the old collective pathos. References to tendencies in popular theatre and the Grass Stage initiatives connect with the article by Chen Chieh-jen and the practice of Zhao Chuan. Another branch of contemporary theatre addresses individuals who see themselves within a new collective context resulting from their existence as workers, from production conditions and related everyday experiences: the actors here are individuals who constitute themselves as such and as subjects by speaking out as workers, by expressing themselves and becoming visible.

What can the collective, the community, the people 'be'? How is it, how are they, to be conceived? These questions, which are particularly urgent today and which run through several of the articles in this collection, lead *Zhang Xian* to his impressive description of how, in China, through political formatting, myth creation and rituals—such as the People's Congress, the Party, and the recruiting of members and representatives—the state and the body politic are construed as empire and become cemented in the people's imaginary. In this way, official (cultural) politics pursue the

expropriation of the people's symbolic capital. Political organs act as "corrupt vested interests groups. [...] They transformed the social and cultural capital as well as every kind of symbolic capital—all of which they had already monopolized—into financial capital. 'State', 'government', 'culture', 'art', 'philanthropy', everything was mixed together and recycled for use in private investments and reproduction. The result of all this was to act as a catalyst for artists' righteous moral indignation at the political rationale." Zhang Xian closes his critical contribution with the metaphorical picture of a herd of sheep which is held together by an electric fence. Again and again the sheep experience electric shocks as they come into contact with the fence, so they continually move back. Finally the electric current is switched off without the sheep noticing. They remain herded close together: "There is no electricity any more, but not one of us touches the fence." To get rid of this mental barrier it is necessary, in times of radical change, to look behind the new imprints of living styles for traces of surviving traditions, traces which are to be found not least thanks to artists. We close the cycle of these investigations with the article by *Zhao Chuan* in which he presents works of art which reflect the impact of tradition on the mind, as memory work and ethics. Painting with dust or water on paper, or piling up stones into small objects in a lonely desert—Zen meditations; thousands of photos of the faces of peasants sitting at a table in a tea-house—the physiognomy of naked life; the ashes of an executed criminal that no one cares about buried in the cement floor of an art place in Shanghai—art as moral action in a society whose ethical foundations are at risk. It is art which records, adjusts something, shifts something slightly, insistently; quiet gestures of personal concern against the dazzling grimace of the consumer culture.

Jörg Huber

Translated by Helen Wallimann

Authors

Chang Tsong-zung, Curator, guest professor at the China Art Academy, art director of Hanart T Z Gallery, co-founder of the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong, co-founder of the Hong Kong chapter of AICA. Active in curating Chinese exhibitions since the 1980s. Pioneered the participation of Chinese art in international exhibitions and was instrumental in establishing the international image of Chinese contemporary art of the 1990s. As a curator with strong attachments to the *literati* tradition he firmly believes that contemporary art should have unique responsibilities in different contexts and take diverse paths. One of his main concerns are the ways in which Chinese art may contribute to world culture. In recent years, a new aspect of his activities centres around the revival of Chinese visual and material culture through the intervention of curatorial practices. These projects involve artefacts, space and ritual, forming a special and unique chapter in Chinese contemporary art. His exhibitions include “China’s New Art Post-1989” in 1993, Special Exhibitions at the Sao Paulo International Biennial in 1994 and 1996, Hong Kong participation at Sao Paulo Biennial 1996 and Venice Biennial 2001, the “Power of the Word” series of exhibitions, “Strange Heaven: Chinese Contemporary Photography”, “Open Asia International Sculpture Exhibition” in Venice 2005, “Yellow Box” series of research projects about contemporary art practice and Chinese space, co-curator of Guangzhou Triennial 2008.

Lu Dadong, born in 1973 in Yantai, Shandong. He is an artist and teacher at the China Academy of Art Hangzhou. He graduated with a Bachelor and Master of Literature from the Departments of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy at the China Academy of Art Hangzhou.

Since 1993 he has taken part in several exhibitions and performances in the fields of ‘Traditional Calligraphy’ and ‘Modern Calligraphy and Art’ in China. He is also the singer of the underground rock band “Yuren yuedui” and the author of several books.

Selected Exhibitions—Modern Calligraphy and Art

2008 “Croisments” Modern Calligraphy with Catherine Denis, Gallerie1918 Art Space, Shanghai

- 2008 “Siji” (Four Seasons) Art Festival within the 80th Anniversary of the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou
- 2007 “Guiling” (Point Zero) Modern Art Exhibition, Hongmai Art Gallery, Shanghai
- 2007 “Kai” Fun, Modern Calligraphy, Taipei City Art Museum, Taipei

Selected Exhibitions—Traditional Calligraphy and Sealing Art

2009 “Contemporary Context” Calligraphy Exhibition, National Art Museum of China, Beijing

Between 2002 and 2007 four exhibitions: Famous calligraphers born in the 70th

Between 2003 and 2005 several exhibitions on “Liuxing shufeng” (Trend Calligraphy) Calligraphy and Sealing Art, Today Art Museum, Beijing

Kong Guoqiao, born in 1968 in Hangzhou. He finished his Master Studies in Graphic Arts at the China Academy of Art (formerly Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts) in 1993. He then became an Assistant Professor there and finished his PhD in 2007. Today Kong Guoqiao is Professor at the China Academy of Art and Head of the Graphic Arts Department.

Chen Anying, born in 1973, Associate Professor at the Department of Art History, Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing. He received his Ph.D. from the Philosophy Department of Peking University in 2001 and then began to work at the Art History Department of Tsinghua. He was a visiting scholar at the Art History Institute of Zurich University in 2006-2007. He has published many articles on art history, art theories and aesthetics. The main courses taught by him are Western Modern Art Theories, Aesthetics, and Visual Culture Studies.

Wang Chunchen is an art critic with a Ph.D in art history and an associate professor. Wang Chunchen now works as a research fellow and curator at the CAFA Art Museum at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing. His research interests include art history methodology and contemporary art theory and criticism. In 2009 he won the CCAA Art Critic Award and published the writing award book *Art Intervenes in Society*.

His publications include translations of *After the End of Art*, *The Abuse of Beauty*, *Art Since 1940*, *The Phenomenology of Painting*, *Language of Art History*, *Interpretation of Art*, and *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*.

He curated the following exhibitions: *Hetero-Imagery—A Kind of Psychology of Urban Image*, Beijing; *See-Through—China’s Contemporary Art*, Hong Kong; *Dynamics of Images*, Beijing; *Supernatural—China’s Photography in the New Century*, New York; *China’s Contemporary Art Today*, Seoul, Korea (co-curated); *Mixed Maze*, London; *Dao of Ink—Jizi’s Solo Exhibition*, Beijing; *ThisAbility—International New Media Art Exhibition*, CAFA Art Museum, Beijing, 2009; *Walking*

Together—German & Chinese Contemporary Art Exhibition, Wuhan Art Museum, Wuhan, 2009, etc.

Qiu Zhijie, born 1969 in Fujian Province, P.R.CHINA

1992 Graduated from The National Academy Of Fine Art. Printmaking department, now he lives in Beijing as a full time artist as well as an art critic and curator. As an artist Qiu is known for his calligraphy, photography and video-installation works. His works have had worldwide exposure in places such as 'Inside Out: New Chinese Art', P.S.I Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998; 'Beijing in London', ICA, London, 1999; 'Power of the Word', Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell College, Iowa/U.S., 2000; 'Translated Acts', Haus Der Kulturen der Welt. Berlin; Queens Museum, New York, 2001; the 25th San Polo Biennial in Brazil and the 53th Venice Biennial, 2009.

In the mid-1990s Qiu also wrote extensively about Chinese conceptual art and performance art, leading to the so call "controversy of signification", which is regarded as the most important debate in art theory in the Chinese art world.

In 1996, Qiu Zhijie was the co-organizer of the first video art exhibition PHENOMENA & IMAGE in the China Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou. He also edited two books which include most of the important documents world wide in the history of video art, making him one of the most important proponents in the field of new media art in China.

In 1999, Qiu curated the exhibition Post-sense Sensibility—Alien Bodies & Delusion in the basement of a residential building in Beijing. It showed the radical experimental works of the young generation of artists which used the human flesh as an artistic material, leading to huge debate in art circles. From then on Qiu was regarded as the leader and spokesperson of the young generation of artists. In 2001, Qiu was one of the chief directors of the important art magazine NEXT-WAVE. In 2002 he became the co-curator of the Long March project.

Chen Chieh-Jen, born in 1960 in Taoyuan, Taiwan, and graduated from a vocational high school for the arts. He currently lives in Taipei.

Using guerrilla-style tactics in his artwork, Chen challenged Taiwan's martial law system of the 1980s and organized several underground exhibitions outside of the art establishment. After martial law was lifted in 1987, Chen stopped working for several years to examine his experience growing up, which included the military courts and prisons, arsenals, industrial areas and illegal structures which existed on the island at the time. He later used these experiences to reflect upon the colonial domination of Taiwan, the Cold War/martial law period, the status of Taiwan as the world's factory in the 1960s and 70s, Taiwan's gradual transformation into a consumer society, the background of Taiwan's inclusion in the neoliberal global economic and political systems, and Taiwan's state of exceptionality in international politics.

Chen Chieh-Jen believes that these years of domination have hidden or eliminated many layers of Taiwan's historical experience and social context, and its soci-

ety is becoming one that forgets easily and fails to measure its future with respect to its history.

Resuming his artwork in 1996, Chen created a series of projects to re-imagine, re-narrate, re-write and re-connect, which started from his local experiences. Primarily a mixture of art actions, performances and installation videos, these works were motivated by a desire to create multiple dialogues with the audience through the liberating poetics of video art, experimental aesthetics and the circulation of the projected image. Chen re-explored memories being obliterated by mainstream discourses and consumerism and the plight of those being marginalized. He saw this work as resisting the loss of memories, as a way of creating connections and dialogue with the experiences of others, as well as a means of contending with the logic of neo-liberal domination.

Chen Chieh-Jen exhibited his work in solo exhibitions at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum; REDCAT art center in Los Angeles; the Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid; and the Asia Society in New York. International group exhibitions include: the Venice Biennale, Biennale de Lyon, São Paulo Art Biennial, Liverpool Biennial, Biennale of Sydney, Istanbul Biennial, Taipei Biennial, Gwangju Biennale, Shanghai Biennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, and the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane. Chen has also participated in photography festivals in Spain, Lisbon and Arles; and film festivals in London, Vancouver, Edinburgh and Rotterdam. Chen Chieh-Jen was the recipient of the Taiwan National Culture and Art Foundation's National Award for Arts in 2009, and the Korean Gwangju Biennale Special Award in 2000.

Gao Shiming, Executive Director of the School of Media and Art, China Art Academy. His subject is visual culture research, contemporary art studies and curatorial studies. He has organized many large exhibitions of academic standing, including *The Migration of Asian Contemporary Art and Geo-politics* (2002-2004), *Techniques of the Visible: the 5th Shanghai Biennial* (2004), *Micrology: Micro-politics in Chinese Contemporary Art* (2005), *The Yellow Box: Contemporary Art and Architecture in a Chinese Space* (2006), *The Alchemy of Shadows: the Third International Lianzhou Photo Festival*, *Reversing Horizons: Artist Reflections of the Hong Kong Handover 10th Anniversary* (2007), *Farewell to Post-colonialism: the Third Guangzhou Triennial*, 2008; *Rehearsal: the 8th Shanghai Biennale*, 2010, and others. He has published several books, including *Visual Thinking: Intangible Dialogue between Art and Phenomenology*, 2002; *Edges of the Earth: Migration of Contemporary Art and Geo-politics in Asia*, 2003; *Mask and Mirror: Visual Studies on the Real and Reality*. 2010.

Chan David Ho Yeung is a curator and author living in Shanghai. In 1999 he graduated with a Master's degree from the Center of Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale on Hudson, New York. Since 1998 he has published many articles and books on Chinese and Asian Contemporary Art. He has also curated several exhibitions and projects in China and overseas. Since 2007 he has

worked as Manager and Director for a number of important Contemporary Art Galleries in Shanghai.

Curatorial Projects (selected)

- 2004 *Para/site: Open work*, Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Vancouver, Canada
Dialogues...; Gu Dexin, Zhang Peili, and Wang Gongxin, Shanghai Gallery of Art, Shanghai
Space anew; Yang Fudong, Wang Jianwai, and Qiu Zhijie, SGA
- 2005 *Gu Dexin 2005.03.05*, Gu Dexin, SGA
In Between Realities, with Chen Shaoxiong, Chen Wenbo, Guan Wei, Li Dafung, Li Yongbin, Wang Xingwei, Zheng Guogu, Zhong Shan, SGA
MVRDV—KM3, Proposals for Chinese Cities, curated by Terence Riley, SGA
From Mundane to extraordinary, new project by Lin Tianmiao, Shen Yuan, and Yin Xiuzhen, SGA
- 2006 *DODGE—Wang Jianwei*, SGA
Live from Zhang Jiang—City in Progress, Hung Keung, Ma Qingyun, Song Tao, Xu Zhen, Xu Tan, Zheng Guogu, SGA
- 2007 *Support—Yan Lei*, SGA
Negative re-actions—Chen Wenbo, Geng Jianyi, Jiang Zhi, Liang Yue, Zhang Liaoyuan, SGA
Export—Cargo transit—Liu Jianhua, SGA
- 2008 *A Spatio-temporal Tunnel—Lin Yilin*, SGA
Realms of Myth—Liang Mee-ping, Liang Wei, Liu Chuang, Ouyang Chun, Qin Qi, SGA
The end has no end...—Du Zhenjun, Zhou Xiaohu, SGA
2008. 6.21—Gu Dexin, SGA
What a difference a day made—Michael Lin, SGA
NOW—Jin Jiangbo, Zeng Li, SGA
- 2009 *Surfacing—Chen Jie, Li Shurui, Wu Guangyu, You Si*, SGA
Alter Ego—Ouyang Chun, SGA
- 2010 *Homestay—Chang Ren, Chen Yujun, Donna Ong, Liang Yue, Leung Mee-ping, Ni Haifeng, Maria Taniguchi, Yuan Yuan, Wang Jianwei*

Wang Nanming, born in Shanghai in 1962, Critic, Curator & Artist

Selected Curatorial Projects

- 2007 *Power Space—Qu Yan's Solo Exhibition*, Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art
- 2007 *Pain in Soul: Performance Art and Video Works by He Chengyao*
- 2008 *A Billion to One: He Chongyue's Solo Exhibition*, Vanessa Art Link, Beijing
- 2008 *The World: Three Photo Series of Qu Yan*, Beijing Wall Art Museum
- 2008 *Booming?: Jin Jiangbo's Solo Exhibition*, Beijing Wall Art Museum

- 2008 Safe Advertisement: The Public Images of Liangyue, Beijing Wall Art Museum
- 2008 Key Words: Development and Harmony of Ni Werihua, Beijing Wall Art Museum

Main Publications

- Metavant-garde: Art and Criticism, Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2006
- Art Must Die, Shanghai Fine Arts Publishers, 2006
- Understanding of Modern Calligraphy: Calligraphy's Transformation Towards the Modern and Vanguard art, Jiang Su Education Publishing House, 1994
- The Honour of Postcolonialism: On the Chineseness of Art and Artists' Chinese Identity
- Arts, System and Low: the Results of China's International Contacts (not yet published)
- The Rise of Critical Art-Chinese Problem Situation and Theories of Liberal Society, 2009

Zhu Qi, born 1966 in Shanghai, China.

Art critic and curator. Now lives in Beijing, China, and works at the China Art Research Institute.

He has curated a series of important exhibitions with Chinese avant-garde artists in the 1990s and has published various articles of art commentary and theses on Chinese contemporary art in the 1990s. His published books include "New Art History and Visual Narrative", "China Avant-garde Photography since 1990", and "Video: New Media Art in Late 20th-Century Art".

Main exhibitions

- 1996 "In the Name of Art—China Contemporary Art Exhibition". This is the first installation exhibition in China. Shanghai, China
- 1997 "New Asia, New city, New art—'97 China-Korea Contemporary Art Exhibition", Shanghai, China
- 1998 "Image Zhiyi—China New Concept Photograph Exhibition". This is the first Chinese avantgarde photograph exhibition. Shanghai, China
- 1999 "Position of East Asia—China-Korea-Japan contemporary exhibition I", Busan, Korea
- 2000 "Reincarnation Times—2000 China Contemporary Art Exhibition", Chengdu, China
- "Position of East Asia—China-Korea-Japan contemporary exhibition II", Yokohama, Japan
- "Between Market and", Beijing, China. "Lead to Utopia Travel of Globalization—The First Asia Experiment Imagery Art Festival", Nanjing, China
- 2002 "Youth-Cruelty" Painting, Beijing, China
- 2004 "Spellbound Aura—The New Vision of Chinese Photography", Taipei Contemporary Art Museum, Taiwan

- 2005 Garret of Language—8 female artists in China Threequarter Gallery, Beijing
The Game of being Low and Shallow: The Rising of the Cartoon Generation on Contemporary Art Exhibition, 3818 Cool Gallery, Beijing. After 1970s: The Generation Changed by Market Today Art museum, Beijing. Ming Yuan Center of Art, Shanghai
- 2006 The Self-Made Generation: A Retrospective of New Paiting Shanghai Zentai Museum of Modern Art. Beyond Experience—CHINA Arario Beijing Gallery, Beijing. Self-landscapes in Transition—Chinese Avant-guard Photography Since 1990, Asia Art Center, Beijing
- 2007 Beijing 798 art festival, 798 art Zone, Beijing. Top10 China contemporary Sculpture Exhibition, Asia Art Center (Beijing). Dragon's Evolution: Chinese Contemporary Photography China Square, New York. Escape by Crafty Scheme—salvation from Traditional and Revolutional Language, Scqure Gallery of Contemporary Art, Nanjing. Narrative, beauty, future —Exhibition of Post-70's New Art, Tang Contemporary Art, Bangkok, Thailand. New Changes: New Art from China, Art Seasons Gallery, Zurich
- 2008 Counter the landscape—The individual and his self-formation in the social transformation, Palazzo della Esposizioni, Rome, Italy. Consumption of History East Asia Contemporary, Shanghai
- 2009 The First Beijing 798 Biennale, 798 art Zone, Beijing

Jiang Wei, freelance curator, publisher and art critic. Curator of a number of high-profile photography exhibitions for the Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai Library, Lianzhou International Photo Festival, Lishui International Photographic Cultural Festival, and others. Winner of the Best Curator Prizes in both the Lianzhou and the Lishui Festival. Named China's Most Important Person in Photography by the Photographer's Companion magazine in two consecutive years. Planned and helped publish over 30 books on photography and contributed to columns in various newspapers, magazines and websites. Wrote many critical articles published by professional media and presented in professional conferences. Recipient of the China Photography Golden Image Award in the category of Critique, the highest ranking award in photography in China, in recognition of his accomplishments. Holder of various positions, including: Theory Committee member of the China Photographers' Association, Editorial Committee member of the China Photographic Annual, Committee Member of the Multi-media Short Film Festival South, Recommendation Committee member of the South Reading Festival, Academic Committee member of the Guangzhou Photo Biennial, juror of the National College Student Photo Competition, and others.

Dao Zi, poet, art critic, painter. Born in Qingdao on November 26th, 1956. Dao Zi graduated from Northwestern University and from Beijing Normal University. He was deputy editor-in-chief of Chang An, a monthly journal organized by the Xi'an Association of Literature and Arts, as well as professor at the Sichuan Fine Arts

Institute. Dao Zi is now a professor and Ph.D. supervisor at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University. He is a member of the International Aesthetics Association.

His research interests include art criticism, modern art history and theory, Christian art, poetry, and Santism Water-Ink Art (Christian Water-Ink Art).

Main works and translations

Daozi Experimental Poetry, China Peace Press, 1987

Selected American Confessional Poetry, LiJiang Press, 1988

Witch Burning: Selected Sylvia Plath's Poems, New Century Press, 1992

Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (by Jean-Francois Lyotard), Hunan Press, 1995

Studies on Chinese Contemporary Oil Painting: Ideological Metamorphosis, Guangxi Art Press, 2000

The Artistic Genealogy of Postmodernism (2 volumes), Chongqing Press, 2001 and re-edition, 2006

The Artist's Reality. Philosophies of Art (by Mark Rothko), Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008

The New Paradigm In Architecture: The Language of Post-modernism (by Charles Jencks), Guangxi Normal University Press

Recent Exhibitions

Path, Truth, Life: Eastern Art Exhibition, The International Church of Christ, ICOC, Beijing, 2008

Chinese Contemporary Poets' Art Exhibition, China Central Academy of Fine Arts, Hong Kong Asian Arts Center, Beijing 2008

A Tale of Two Cities: Contemporary Great Artists' Exhibition, Tsingdao- Chengdu, 2008

International Art Annual Exhibition, Sunshine Art Gallery, Beijing 2008

21 Century Ink Academic Exhibition, Beijing 2008

Transformation Eastern Art Exhibition, The International Church of Christ, ICOC, Beijing, 2009

Xun Dao: Searching For Spirituality In Contemporary Chinese Art. Frede-reke Taylor Gallery, N.Y. 2009

1st China Chinese Ink Biennale, Linzhou ,Beijing,Xian 2009-2010

To Give Witness About The Light, Chongqing 2009

Jin Feng, born 1962 Born in Shanghai. 1990 graduated from the Fine Art Department of Nanjing Normal University. Lives and works in Shanghai.

Solo Exhibitions

2009 Luxun Invited the Intelligentsia for Banquet, Xianheng Restaurant, Shanghai

2008 The Problems Scenes, Zhendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai

2007 Insult Art, Jin Feng's Solo Exhibition, BizArt Art Center, Shanghai, China

- 2006 Jin Feng's solo exhibition, Creative Garden 2577, Shanghai, China
 2003 Exhibitions of Jin Feng Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong, China
 2002 Jin Feng's Photography, Art Moscow. Central House of Artist, Moscow, Russia

Group Exhibitions

- 2010 3+1 Ge Zi Biao Shu Contemporary Art Exhibition, Arther M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology at Peking University
 2009 Contemporary Art in Songjiang, Songjiang, Shanghai
 2008 798 Beijing Biennale, 798 Beijing
 2007 Grassroots Humanism 21 Cases of Contemporary Art
 2007 Soft Power Asian Attitude, Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, China
 2006 Hiroshima Artists Archives Exhibition, Hiroshima, Japan
 2005 Taiwan-China Performance Art Meeting, Taipei MoMA, Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan
 2005 Macau International Live Performance Art Show, Ox Warehouse, Macau
 2005 Blind date, Emstetten, Germany
 2005 Montpellier/China: MC1, Montpellier, France
 2004 Shanghai Duolun Exhibition of Young Artists, Shanghai, China 2004 China—The Body Everywhere, Marseille, France
 2003 Return Nature: Pastoral, Nanjing Shenghua Arts Center, China
 2003 Strange Heaven, Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague
 2002 The First Guangzhou Triennial. Guangdong Museum of Art
 2001 Asia-Multiply Raising Up (The 16th Asia International Art Show), Guangzhou
 2001 Chengdu Biyearly Exhibition, Chengdu, China
 1999 14th International Exhibition of Asia Art, FuKuoKa, Japan

Tao Qingmei, Associate professor at the Comparative Literature Department at the Institute of Chinese Literature of CASS (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing). Her main research interests are in the area of Modern Theatre with particular emphasis on the relationship of Chinese modern theatre with multicultural interaction and exchange. In 2000, she obtained her Ph.D. in Chinese Literature from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Beijing Normal University.

Zhang Xian is one of the earliest independent Chinese playwrights in the Post-Mao Era. At the very start of his art career, he developed his underground art production and life practice in order to cope with the difficulties of his time. Following a long period of editing and writing for the press, magazines, screenplays and film scripts, he initiated and organized several non-governmental art organizations and theatre work spaces.

As a playwright, director and producer, more than ten of Zhang Xian's dramatic plays and dances have been performed in many cities around China, Europe and America. The first dance performance of *Tongue's Memory of Home* won the ZKB Patronage prize of the Zurich Theater Spektakel 2006.

As a film script writer, his film *Those Left Behind* won the Best Film of the Golden Pyramid Award at the 16th Cairo International Film Festival, and *Jasmin Flower* won the judges prize of the 7th Shanghai International Festival.

As an organizer and curator, Zhang Xian initiated the independent drama group Z and the dance group Zuhe Niao and established the Hard Han Café Theater. He organized the first non-beneficial art and performance base Down Steam Garage in Shanghai as well as several of the earliest art festivals such as the Fringe festival, Idea Festival, or the Free Cinema Festival.

Zhang Xian also acted as judge of the the 18th Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theater and DEON Fund Young Choreographer Project.

Zhao Chuan is a writer, theatre worker and art critic. He writes art columns and regularly publishes in magazines and art periodicals in China and overseas. He published books of fiction and non-fiction, including on contemporary art history. He was awarded Taiwan's prestigious Lianhe Wenxue (Unitas) New Fiction Writer's Prize and received other international arts residencies and grants over the years. Zhao Chuan is the founder and director of Grass Stage, an important theatre group in China. Under his guidance, this collective became the focus for a lot of attention in the economic boom years currently experienced by China, both for their fresh thinking against the conventional mode of theatre production and for the independent position they maintain with regards to the mass community. His theater pieces were performed in cities in Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan.